



# SCI&D SPIRIT

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*CATCH the SPIRIT*

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
VA Boston Healthcare System  
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

## Veteran Sails Again

A writer, I spent a lot of my adult life indoors. I took pleasure in the outdoors and tried to mix my writing with being there, and on boats especially. In fact for years I wrote for the boating press. Then, at two in the morning of March 5, 2010, having just returned from the West Indies, I fell from an armless desk chair while sitting down and found myself on the floor, paralyzed. Suddenly, at age 64, an active boating life was no more.

Initially, doctors thought my C3, ASIA D spinal cord injury required rehabilitation only. I spent two months in three different Boston-area hospitals before I was transferred to the VA Boston Healthcare System (VA BHS) in West Roxbury. And a lucky thing I was, for by the end of June it was determined I needed to have my C3 fused to my C4. The surgery was performed successfully by Dr. Jacob Rachlin at VA BHS.

Recuperation and rehabilitation took most of the fall. Numerous people helped me, none more than Mr. Huichaun Li, Occupational Therapist; Ms. Lee Morris, Physical Therapist; and Mr. Jim Kelsey and Ms. Eileen Craffey, Kinesiotherapists. Aquatic therapy with Jim and Eileen was perhaps the single most beneficial thing I did. Overseeing all of this with her enthusiastic eye was Dr. Marika Hess, SCI Physician.

I had fallen because my right hip, which had been scheduled to be replaced that April, gave way. It was finally replaced a year later, in April 2011, and this enabled me to walk again. It also made the notion of getting back on the water possible.

It was a perfect day for sailing when I left the skilled nursing facility I live in and drove with my two sons to Newport, RI. The sloop we rented, a Freedom 20, was

specially equipped with a plastic molded skipper's seat for the handicapped. The wind, out of the southwest, was blowing ten to fifteen knots under clear skies and scores of sails dotted the bay, from Jamestown Bridge as far south as you could see. The sloop heeled, the sails pulled, and the crew sat braced and pleased.

That sail was my first after the spinal cord injury and at first, in the protected inner harbor, it was like old times. But once we were out on Narragansett Bay I found I couldn't take the pounding that any boat gives, under sail or power. I tried sailing to windward but had to fall off almost as soon as the boat found her groove. Still, in more sheltered waters, I could sail off the wind and my sons took over on the wind.

I'll be going again, and maybe my spine will have strengthened enough to absorb the pounding a little better. Either way, I am back in the skipper's chair.

*- Written by Mr. Richard Dey*



Richard Dey in the skipper's chair.  
Photo by: Alex Dey

*Veterans interested in adaptive sailing or other adaptive sports should contact Kelly Cossaboom, VA BHS adaptive sports case manager, at:*  
**(774) 826-2036**

## Summer Safety

As New Englanders, we all savor the long sunny days of summer. Though we all must take precautions to protect our skin from sun exposure, those with SCI must take special care to prevent heat stroke.

People with SCI often have reduced ability to regulate temperature. The body's circulatory system may not get rid of the excess heat via sweat. Moreover, if you have SCI you may not be aware of the problem until it is too late, since your skin may be unable to feel the sensation of heat. Therefore, it is very important to take preventive measures to avoid overheating or heat stroke.

Symptoms of heat stroke can include headache, dizziness, confusion and loss of consciousness. There can be severe complications including electrolyte disturbances, renal failure and even death. Prompt medical treatment is essential in such instances.

What can you do to prevent heat stroke? If temperature is over 90 degrees stay in an air conditioned environment, stay hydrated by drinking water, avoid alcohol and caffeine, wear light clothing, limit time and intensity of outdoor activity, and try to stay in shady and cooler areas.

*Enjoy your summer.*



Sunil Sabharwal, MD  
Chief SCI/D Services

## Weekly Wellness Workshops

A medical issues and information workshop for SCI inpatients and outpatients successfully was launched by the SCI team this March. The workshop, covers topics such as The Uses of Humor in Healthcare; Positive Thinking and the Relationship to Overall Health; Important Reasons to Set Health Goals Now.

All veterans with a spinal cord injury are welcome to join the meetings every Tuesday between 12:15p to 1:00p in Room A-25, SCI Day Room, West Roxbury Campus. Suggestions for topics to discuss at future meetings are welcome.

For additional information please contact Barbara Cooper, Ph.D. 857 203-6502

- July 10: Top Ten Stress Relievers
- July 17: Self Esteem and Your Health: 4 Steps to Feel Better about Yourself
- July 24: Weight Management and You
- July 31: Ten Steps for Dealing with a Chronic Condition
- August 7: Personal Resources: Different Coping Strategies and Ways to Seek Support from Others

For future topics contact the SCI Office @ 857-203-6574

## Transportation Assistance

Getting to and from the VA for medical appointments, admissions or respite stays is sometimes difficult. Eligibility criteria for VA travel are listed below as well as other community transportation options.

### Criteria for VA Travel: (to/from VA only)

Veterans who need Special Mode Transportation (wheelchair van or ambulance).

**AND**

Veterans who have a Service Connected (SC) Disability of 30% or more or traveling for treatment of SC disability.

**OR**

Veterans who receive a NSC VA pension.

**OR**

Veterans who have a gross household income not exceeding the maximum VA pension rate.

### Other Transportation Options:

Community Paratransit - Some will provide transportation to Boston Hospitals on a weekly basis. (examples include: MBTA RIDE, Bat Bus, MART, LRTA, GATRA, PVRT and CCRT ).

Local Elder Service Agencies or Councils on Aging often provide wheelchair transportation.

PVA Wheelchair Van, call PVA office in Walpole, MA 508-660-1181/ 800-660-1181.

If you have questions or need assistance with travel you may contact the following social workers for assistance:

- SCI Outpatient Social Worker, Jeanine Penzo @ 857-203-6498) for appointments,
- SCI Inpatient Social Worker, Tracey Presley @ 857-203-6126 for admissions/discharges
- SCI Long Term Care Social Worker, Shirley Jackson @ 774-826-1809 for 81B admissions/respite.

## Celebrating Accomplishments

On May 11, 2012, the SCI/D and Rehab staff celebrated with Wayne Ross, SCI Veteran, and Eileen Craffey, Kinesiotherapist. Wayne had completed 1,000 swims since his SCI accident in October 1996.

Prior to his injury, Wayne was a professional cyclist. He was injured in a charity bicycle marathon for the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation. He had cycled 8054 miles from Alaska to Guatemala City. There, on 10/23/96, as he was cycling, he hit the rear end of a bus that had made a sudden stop. He suffered a tetraplegic injury.

Post injury, Wayne continues an active lifestyle. Wayne swims twice a week, participates in air rifle, bowling, VA National Winter and Summer Games, VA Regional Games, and has competed in the Paralympics Trials.

Congratulations, Wayne! You surely are an inspiration to all!



Wayne Ross, SCI Veteran, and Eileen Craffey, Kinesiotherapist, celebrate Wayne's 1000 swims



## The 11<sup>th</sup> Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Conference

The 11<sup>th</sup> Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Conference was held on April 13, 2012 at the VA Boston Healthcare System. The Barsamian Auditorium was at maximum capacity with nursing students from a variety of nursing schools.

The goal of the conference is to educate the community on the fundamentals of SCI/D care. The topics covered at the conference included introduction to spinal cord injury, autonomic dysreflexia, bowel and bladder management, nutritional requirements, therapy, improving awareness of disability and spinal cord injury from a patient perspective. Psychosocial aspects of spinal cord injury such as adjustment to a spinal cord injury and recreation were also discussed.

Special thanks are owed to the Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Staff for providing yet another successful conference!



Participants in the conference pictured left to right: Kelly Skinner, NP, Rick Wentworth, SCI/D Veteran, Caitlin McPhelimy, Psychology Intern, and Maggie Budd, Neuropsychologist

### Congratulations Jennifer!

Jennifer Leonard is the recipient of the 2012 Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing for the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) category at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

Jennifer has worked on the SCI long-term care unit at the Brockton Campus for over five years. She was publicly recognized at the Nurses Day Ceremony on Monday, May 7, 2012. Many of the SCI Team attended this event to show their support.

Congratulations Jennifer on this well deserved honor!



Pictured Left to Right:  
Sunil Sabharwal, MD, Ron Martin, RN,  
Jennifer Leonard, LPN and Shawn  
Whitman, HT

### New SCI/D Case Manager

Deanna Crowley, RN, is no longer in the role of SCI/D Nurse Case Manager and has transitioned to her new position in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit at VA Boston Health Care System. Deanna will be missed by both the SCI/D staff and patients.

Nancy Brooks, RN, is the new Nurse Case Manager for the SCI/D service. She transitioned into her new role in April 2012.

Nancy acquired her BSN from Curry College. She has a vast knowledge set with experience that includes surgical ICU, PACU, home care, and 15 years in acute SCI. The SCI/D service welcomes Nancy to her new position.

Nancy can be reached by telephone @ 857-203-5371.



Nancy Brooks, RN  
SCI/D Case Manager

### Caregiver Corner

#### Quick Ways to Relax this Summer

As soon as the temperatures begin to rise and the evenings begin to grow longer, we all start dreaming of Rest and Relaxation. Did you know that without leaving home, caregivers can build some much needed R & R into their schedules? You do not need large blocks of time for this. Consider the following:

- Take your glass of lemonade or ice tea out to the porch, deck or yard to enjoy. Keep favorite magazines handy and bring one with you.
- Bring summer flowers into a room where you can sit and enjoy them.
- Invite a friend for coffee or lunch and remember to keep it simple. It is the companionship that is important.
- Take a walk in your neighborhood.

Remember that taking time for YOU also benefits the Veteran you are caring for. Decreasing caregiver stress helps you to provide the care your loved one needs.

You may contact Jeanine Penzo, LICSW with any caregiver questions or needs @ 857-203-6498.



VA Boston Healthcare System  
1400 VFW Parkway  
West Roxbury, MA 02132  
800-865-3384  
<http://www.boston.va.gov>  
Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran  
1 Veteran Way  
Boston, MA 02122

## Outpatient Program for Chronic Pain Management

Chronic pain can be a significant problem in people with SCI. Last year we started offering additional outpatient pain management services, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), in the SCI clinic. CBT for pain is a treatment approach that teaches people skills for identifying negative thoughts and feelings related to pain (e.g., I can't deal with this pain) and helps them modify maladaptive behaviors that tend to promote disability (e.g., excessive rest, watching too much television). The primary goal of treatment is to improve a person's overall quality of life while reducing their psychological distress.

This Fiscal Year starting October 2011, we began gathering data to help assess outcomes of this treatment program. The graphs on the right are based on initial data from 10 patients. While the measurements are based on a small number of patients, these initial results are definitely encouraging. People served in the program are relatively satisfied with the pain services and have a positive perception of the treatment (Figure 1). The average pain rating improved somewhat after treatment, falling from 8 to 6.5 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst pain, and even more importantly, CBT treatment seemed to decrease the degree to which pain interfered with general activity, mobility, work, and self-care (Figure 2) and reduced depressive symptoms.

Figure 1: Perceptions of Treatment

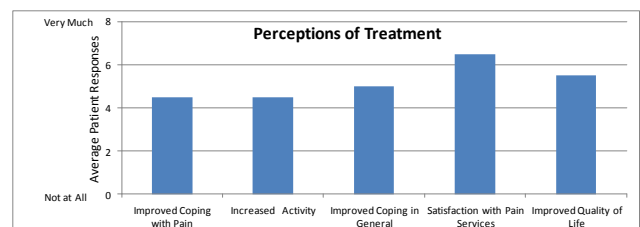
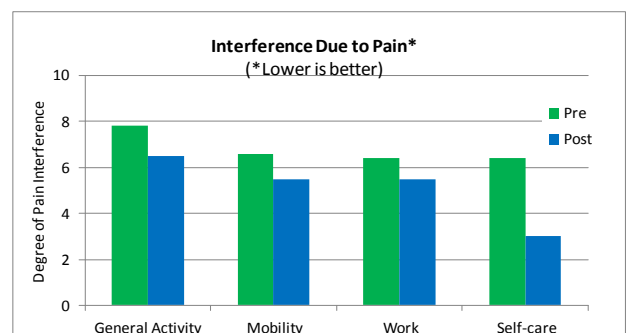


Figure 2: Interference Due to Pain



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